

Claims

We claim:

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1. A method for providing assistance to a customer at a web site, comprising the steps of:

receiving a request for a web page from a customer;
sending said web page without a HELP option to said customer;
automatically determining if said customer should be provided assistance; and
if said customer should be provided assistance then sending a HELP option to said customer.

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2. The method of claim 1 wherein said step of automatically determining if said customer needs assistance comprises:

reviewing the saved customer profile; and
if the profile indicates assistance should be provided then determining that said customer should be provided assistance.

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3. The method of claim 1 wherein said step of automatically determining if said customer needs assistance comprises:

measuring the time that said customer spends on said web page; and
if said time exceeds a predetermined time then determining that said customer should be provided assistance.

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4. The method of claim 1 wherein said step of automatically determining if said customer needs assistance comprises:

measuring the time that said customer spends on an area or field within said web page; and
if said time exceeds a predetermined time then determining that said customer should be provided assistance.

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5. The method of claim 1 wherein:

said step of automatically determining if said customer needs assistance comprises measuring the time that said customer spends on said web page, and if said time exceeds a predetermined time then determining that said customer should be provided assistance; and

said step of sending said web page comprises sending a heartbeat to a customer with said web page, said heartbeat periodically sending a message to said web site.

6. The method of claim 1 wherein:

said step of automatically determining if said customer needs assistance comprises measuring the time that said customer spends on said web page, and if said time exceeds a predetermined time then determining that said customer should be provided assistance;

said step of sending said web page comprises sending a heartbeat to a customer with said web page, said heartbeat periodically sending a message to said web site; and

said step of measuring the time comprises counting the number of said messages.

7. The method of claim 1 wherein:

said step of automatically determining if said customer needs assistance comprises measuring the time that said customer spends on said web page, and if said time exceeds a predetermined time then determining that said customer should be provided assistance;

said step of sending said web page comprises sending a heartbeat to a customer with said web page, said heartbeat periodically sending a message to said web site;

said step of measuring the time comprises counting the number of said messages; and

said step of determining if said time exceeds said predetermined time comprises comparing said number of messages with a predetermined number of messages.

8. The method of claim 1 wherein said step of automatically determining if said customer needs assistance comprises:

reviewing electronic forms with entries from the customer; and

if there are errors of significance in the electronic forms then determining that said customer should be provided assistance.

9. The method of claim 1 wherein said step of automatically determining if said customer needs assistance comprises:

counting the number of times that a customer returns to said web page; and

if said number exceeds a predetermined number then determining that said customer should be provided assistance.

10. The method of claim 1 wherein said step of automatically determining if said customer needs assistance comprises:

determining if customer is at a service point; and

if said customer is at a service point, then determining that said customer should be provided assistance.

11. The method of claim 1 wherein said step of sending said HELP option to said customer comprises sending a new web page to said customer, said new web page comprising said HELP option.

12. The method of claim 1 wherein said step of sending said HELP option to said customer comprises inserting a HELP option in the web page being viewed by the customer.

13. The method of claim 1 and, before said step of sending said HELP option to said customer, further comprising the following:

determining whether a customer service representative is available; and

if a said customer service representative is not available then delaying said step of sending said HELP option to said customer until a customer service representative is available.

14. The method of claim 1 and, before said step of sending said HELP option to said customer, further comprising the following:

determining whether a customer service representative is available; and

if a said customer service representative is not available but will be available within a predetermined time then delaying said step of sending said HELP option to said customer until a customer service representative is available.

15. The method of claim 1 and, before said step of sending said HELP option to said customer, further comprising the following:

determining an estimated time before a customer service representative will be available; and

if said estimated time exceeds a predetermined time then delaying said step of sending said HELP option to said customer until said estimated time does not exceed said predetermined time.

5 16. The method of claim 1 and, before said step of sending said HELP option to said customer, further comprising the following:

 determining an estimated time before a customer service representative will be available, and if said estimated time exceeds a predetermined time then delaying said step of sending said HELP option to said customer until said estimated time does not exceed said
10 predetermined time; and

 wherein said predetermined time is determined based upon measurements of the time between the time that a HELP option is sent to a previous customer and the time that said previous customer responds to said HELP option.

 17. The method of claim 1, and further comprising:

 measuring the time since said HELP option was sent to said customer;

 if said time since said HELP option was sent has exceeded a predetermined response time without a response from said customer, then removing the HELP option or sending another web page to said customer, said another web page not having said HELP option.

 18. The method of claim 17, wherein said predetermined response time is determined based upon measurements of the time between the time that a HELP option is sent to a previous customer and the time that said previous customer responds to said HELP
25 option.

 19. The method of claim 1 wherein said HELP option is a HELP button.

 20. The method of claim 1 wherein said HELP option is a HELP screen.

30 21. The method of claim 1 wherein said HELP option is a audio message.

 22. The method of claim 1 wherein said HELP option is a video message.

23. A method for providing assistance to a customer at a web site, comprising the steps of:

receiving a request for a web page from a customer;
determining whether a customer service representative is available;

5 if a said customer service representative is available then sending said web page to said customer with a HELP option on said web page.

24. The method of claim 23 and further comprising:
if a said customer service representative is not available then:

10 determining an estimated time before a customer service representative will be available; and

if said estimated time is less than a predetermined time then sending said web page to said customer with a HELP option on said web page.

25. The method of claim 23 and further comprising:

if a said customer service representative is not available then determining an estimated time before a customer service representative will be available, and if said estimated time is less than a predetermined time then sending said web page to said customer with a HELP option on said web page;

wherein said predetermined time is determined based upon measurements of the multiple incidences of time between the time that a HELP option is sent to a previous customer and the time that said previous customer responds to said HELP option.

26. The method of claim 23, and further comprising:

measuring the time since said HELP option was sent to said customer;

25 if said time since said HELP option was sent has exceeded a predetermined response time without a response from said customer, then sending another web page to said customer, said another web page not having said HELP option.

30 27. The method of claim 23, and further comprising:

measuring the time since said HELP option was sent to said customer, if said time since said HELP option was sent has exceeded a predetermined response time without a

response from said customer, then sending another web page to said customer, said another web page not having said HELP option;

wherein said predetermined response time is determined based upon measurements of the time between the time that a HELP option is sent to a previous customer and the time that said previous customer responds to said HELP option.

28. The method of claim 23 wherein said HELP option is a HELP button.

29. The method of claim 23 wherein said HELP option is a HELP screen.

30. The method of claim 23 wherein said HELP option is a audio message.

31. The method of claim 23 wherein said HELP option is a video message.

32. A method for providing assistance to a customer at a web site, comprising the steps of:

receiving a request for a web page from a customer;

determining whether a customer service representative is available;

determining an estimated time before a customer service representative will be available; and

if said estimated time is less than a predetermined time then sending said web page to said customer with a HELP option on said web page.

33. The method of claim 32 wherein said predetermined time is determined based upon measurements of the time between the time that a HELP option is sent to a previous customer and the time that said previous customer responds to said HELP option.

34. The method of claim 32, and further comprising:

measuring the time since said HELP option was sent to said customer;

if said time since said HELP option was sent has exceeded a predetermined response time without a response from said customer, then sending another web page to said customer, said another web page not having said HELP option.

35. The method of claim 32, and further comprising:

measuring the time since said HELP option was sent to said customer, if said time since said HELP option was sent has exceeded a predetermined response time without a response from said customer, then sending another web page to said customer, said another web page not having said HELP option;

wherein said predetermined response time is determined based upon measurements of the time between the time that a HELP option is sent to a previous customer and the time that said previous customer responds to said HELP option.

36. The method of claim 32 wherein said HELP option is a HELP button.

37. The method of claim 32 wherein said HELP option is a HELP screen.

38. The method of claim 32 wherein said HELP option is a audio message.

39. The method of claim 32 wherein said HELP option is a video message.

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